MAN'S SPIRITUAL ORIGIN AND NATURE

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS VAUGHAN

Compiled (with Biographical Note)
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Thomas Vaughan on Man's Spiritual Origin and Nature.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

GIORDANO BRUNO was Theosophy's apostle in the sixteenth century, according to Dr. Besant. Thomas Vaughan, who was born about thirty years after Bruno was burned at the stake, was Theosophy's witness in the seventeenth century. The one carried a fiery torch throughout Europe, the other was unknown outside a very small circle in the British Isles.

The twin brothers, Henry and Thomas Vaughan, were born in the parish of Llansantffraid among the Brecon Beacons in Wales, on April 17th, 1622, three years before the death of James I, and four years before Bacon died. The Vaughans came, it is claimed, from "an ancient and honourable Welsh family"—the Vaughans of Tretower Castle, in Brecknockshire. (It is of interest to note, by the way, that Tretower Castle was very largely restored some years ago with the aid of a fund subscribed for this purpose in Wales, and the building is now registered as "ancient monument" under the care of H.M. Office of Works). It is said that the family descended from Sir Roger Vaughan, who fell at Agincourt. The boys' mother, whose family name was Denys Gwillims, was the heiress of Newton.

It was said of Henry that he "conversed with angels and spirits." He was one of that small band of mystical poets of the seventeenth century in England whose position is not only high, but is in many respects unique. A few of Henry Vaughan's poems are among the finest in the English language, among them "The Retreat," "Friends Departed," and the unforgettable "I Saw Eternity the Other Night." Henry Vaughan is supposed to have been influenced by that other great religious poet—a compatriot, and perhaps a relative—George Herbert. The Dictionary of National Biography suggests, however, that "Herbert visits the spiritual world as a pious pilgrim, but Vaughan is never out of it." Henry's grave may still be seen in the churchyard of the newly-built St. Bridget's Church, where his brother Thomas for some years officiated as Rector.[1] About three or four years ago a mural tablet was unveiled to the memory of Henry in the little church of Llansantffraid, which overlooks the Usk towards the village of Talybont.

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1 Thomas Vaughan "was presented to the living of Llansantffraid by his kinsman Sir George Vaughan," on his return from Jesus College, Oxford. (See *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, edited by A. E. Waite).

All footnotes are by the compiler.

Thomas took part in the Civil War of 1642 (as did his brother Henry). He was a Royalist, as were most of the clergy in Wales at that time. It appears that the fact that Thomas had fought on the side of the King resulted in his being turned out of his living in 1649 by a Parliamentary Commission, under an Act for the Propagation of the Gospel. Thereafter, Vaughan sought "the quiet and repose of Oxford" in order to pursue his studies, and he lived there under the protection and patronage of Sir Thomas Murray, Secretary of State for Scotland, in the days of the Commonwealth. He seems to have published his more important books between 1650 and 1652, before he was thirty years of age—when, as he himself says, his years were "few and green." Vaughan is supposed to have died as a result of an explosion in the course of some chemical experiments in 1665, but a letter by his brother Henry merely says that he died "upon an employment for His Majesty."

Vaughan refers to his age as one of "intellectual slaveries." "It is in nature as it is in religion: we are still hammering . . . old elements, but seek not the America that lies beyond them." That remark was meant to apply to philosophical and religious matters, but it is one that seems natural to a writer living in the afterglow, as it were, of that great period of discoveries, the Elizabethan Age. As to the burning issues of his day, Vaughan's position may be gathered from his remark that he was "neither papist or sectary, but a true, resolute protestant in the best sense of the Church of England."

In the Foreword to *The Works of Thomas Vaughan* it is suggested that the "mantle of Robert Fludd may be said to have fallen upon the shoulders of Vaughan, who in his time and generation continued the apostolate of the Secret Tradition, as this is represented by the secret and more spiritual side of alchemical philosophy." Vaughan, however, only refers to Fludd once or twice throughout his writings, and himself avers: "I follow the principles of Cornelius Agrippa. . . . He is indeed my author, and next to God I owe all that I have unto him." Vaughan salutes Agrippa's memory thus:

> How am I rapt when I contemplate thee
> And wind myself above all that I see.
> The spirits of thy lines infuse a fire—
> Like the world's soul—which make me thus aspire.
> I am embodied by thy books and thee,
> And in thy papers find my ecstacy.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Now a new East beyond the stars I see
> Where breaks the day of thy divinity.

Vaughan wrote in English, and he was the first to write on mystical and occult subjects in the vernacular. At the end of the first of his tracts, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, he says that he would not have the reader "look here for the paint and trim of rhetoric, and the rather because English is

a language the author was not born to." When allowance is made for what we may call his "period" phraseology, Vaughan employs English with charm and piquancy. Vaughan had a great deal of knowledge that he could not give out in his time, and frankly says as much over and over again. He was first and foremost an occult philosopher. Alchemy as ordinarily understood was, to Vaughan, "a torture of metals." In alchemy, he says, "I never did believe: much less did I study it." Again, he says that he pities "the distractions of our modern alchemists," and avers that his concern is the study of Nature and Nature's mysteries.

May, 1941. D. J. W.

The Spiritual Nature of Man.

THE following extracts from *Anthroposophia Theomagica* will give some idea of Vaughan's view of the spiritual and occult nature of man.

THE DESCENT INTO MANIFESTATION.

"I look upon this life as the progress of an Essence Royal. The Soul but quits her Court to see the country. Heaven hath in it a scene of earth, and had she been contented with Ideas she had not travelled beyond the map.[1] But excellent Patterns commend their mimes.[2] Nature that was so fair in the Type could not be a slut in the anaglyph. . . Thus her descent speaks (of) her original. God in love with His own beauty frames a glass[3] to view it by reflection. But (because of) the frailty of . . . matter excluding eternity,[4] the composure was subject to dissolution. . . ."

MAN A BRANCH ROOTED IN GOD.

"When I found out this truth," says Vaughan, beginning his *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, "that man in his original was a branch rooted in God, and that there was a continual influx from the stock to the scion, I was much troubled at his corruptions." The problem of man's imperfect nature, despite his divine origin, puzzled Vaughan, and he says, "in this perplexity I studied several arts and rambled over all those inventions which the folly of man called sciences . . ." In Vaughan's view, "man had at the first—and so have all souls before their entrance into the body—an explicit methodical knowledge; but they are no sooner vested but that liberty is lost and nothing remains but a vast confused notion. . . ."

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1 There would have been no "descent" or involution into matter.
2 "Mimes" may be regarded as material or shadowy representations of Eternal "Patterns".
3 Manifestation:—Beauty "made manifest".
4 Matter that is subject to Time.

Vaughan explains that he resolved to "quit this book business," and thought it a "better course to study Nature than opinion." He came apparently to the conclusion that "man was not the primitive, immediate work of God, but the world out of which he was made." He came, later, to the view that the "world in the beginning was no such thing as it is, but some other Seed or Matter out of which that fabric which I now behold did arise . . . but what that Matter should be I could not guess."

THE FIRST EMANATION.

"You are to understand that God—before His work of creation—was wrapped up and contracted in Himself.[1] In this state the Egyptians styled Him the Solitary Monad, and the Kabalists Dark Aleph; but when the decreed instant of Creation came, then appeared Bright Aleph, and the First Emanation was that of the Holy Ghost into the Bosom of Matter. . . . No sooner had the Divine Light pierced the Bosom of Matter but the Idea or Pattern of the whole material world appeared in those primitive waters, like an image in a glass. . . . But the Idea I speak of here is the true, primitive, exemplar one and a pure influence of the Almighty. This Idea, before the coagulation of the seminal principles to a gross outer fabric—which is the end of generation—impresseth in the vital, ethereal principles a model or pattern after which the body is to be framed."

Vaughan then proceeds to deal with "the separation of several substances from the same mass," and to "examine that limbus or huddle of Matter wherein all things were so strangely contained." What we may perhaps call the process of involution is roughly hinted at under a general description that may be summarised by the phrase that the "darkness was thrust downwards."

LIGHT AS MANIFESTATION.

A passage from *Alua Lucis* is inserted here because it throws some more light upon the process of what we to-day call involution into matter. (A few footnotes have been added to try to give a modern meaning to some words).

"Light originally had no other birth than manifestation, for it was not made but discovered.[2] It is properly the life of everything, and it is that which acts in all particulars. . . . Trismegistus, in his vision of creation did first see a pleasing, gladsome light, but interminated.[3] Afterwards appeared a horrible sad darkness, and this moved downwards, descending from the Eye of Light. . . . This darkness . . .was condensed into a certain water, but not without a mournful,

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1 The Point within the Circle—the Unmanifested.
2 Revealed, un-covered.
3 Boundless, infinite.

inexpressible voice or sound. . . . After this . . . the Holy Word came out of the light and did get upon the water, and out of the water he made all things. . . . This is the physical and famous Pythagorean cube, which surpriseth[1] all forms, and retains them prisoners. . . . The consequences of this prison[2] which sometimes are sad, and the steps which lead into it, are most elegantly expressed in the oracles. 'A steep descent extends beneath the Earth[3] leading seven ways by stages, beneath which is the throne of a horrible necessity.'[4] In a word, all things in the world—as well as events and substances—flow out of this Well. Hence come our fortunes and our misfortunes, our riches and our poverty, and this according to the scales of the Supreme Agent. . . ."

MAN'S "INNOCENCE" AND "FALL".

As to man, he was "in the beginning—I mean the substantial, inward man—both in and after his creation, for some short time, a pure Intellectual Essence. . . . In this state, the *anima* or sensitive nature did not prevail over the spiritual, as it doth now in us. For the superior mental part of man was united to God by an essential contact[5]. . . . Man, as long as he continued in his union to God, knew the Good only—that is, the things that were of God. But as soon as he stretched forth his hand and did eat of the forbidden fruit, that is, the middle soul or spirit of the greater world . . . his union to the Divine Nature was dissolved; and his spirit being united to the spirit of the world, he knew the evil only, that is, the things that were of the world. . . ."

". . . The perfection of innocence was lost upon his Fall from the Divine Light. . . ."

"You see now," says Vaughan, "if you be not men of a most dense head, how man fell, and, by consequence, you may guess by what means he is to rise. He must be united to the Divine Light, from whence by disobedience he was separated . . ." "The soul of man, while she is in a body, is like a candle shut up in a dark lanthorn, or a fire that is stifled for want of air. . . ." The souls of men "here below, 'in the circle of generation,' they mourn because of the darkness and solitude, like people locked up in a pest-house. This it is makes the soul subject to many passions, to such a Proteus of humours. Now she flourishes, now she withers—now a smile, now a tear; and when she hath played out her stock, then comes a repetition of the same fancies, till at last she cries out with Seneca: 'How long this self-same round?' This is occasioned by her vast and infinite capacity,

1 Which "catches hold" of or includes all forms.
2 Prison-house of matter.
3 Root-Matter: "sophic, spiritual Earth." (Vaughan writes of a "threefold Earth"—"elementary," "celestial" and "spiritual").
4 The circle of necessity: world of material evolution.
5 This was the "state of innocence," says Vaughan.

which is satisfied with nothing but God, from whom at first she descended. . . . In her are patterns and notions of all things in the world. . . . She makes an invisible voyage from one place to another and presents to herself things absent as if they were present. The dead live to her: there is no grave can hide them from her thoughts. Now she is here in dirt and mire, and in a trice above the moon. . . ."

"THE SOUL STANDING."

"But this is nothing. If she were once out of the body she could act all that she imagined. 'In a moment,' saith Agrippa, 'whatever she desires, that shall follow. . . .' In this state . . . she can in an instant transfer her own vessel from one place to another. She can—by an union with Universal Force—infuse and communicate her thought to the absent, be the distance never so great. Neither is there anything under the sun but she may know it, and—remaining only in one place—she can acquaint herself with all the actions of all places whatsoever. . . . Finally—(in a quotation from Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia*) 'there is no work in the whole course of Nature, however arduous, however excellent, however supernatural it may be, that the human soul, when it has attained the source of its divinity—which the Magi term the soul standing and not falling—cannot accomplish by its own power and apart from any external help. . . .'" He (God) it is to whom we must be united by 'an essential contact,' and then we shall know all things 'shewn forth openly by clear Vision in the Divine Light' ". . . For He made man—as it were—for His playfellow, that he might survey and examine His works."

DEATH, A RECESSION.

"Thus far, Reader, I have handled the composition and royalty of man. I shall now speak something of his dissolution, and close up my discourse—as he doth his life—with death. Death is a 'recession of life into the hiddenness,' a retreat of hidden natures to the same state they were in before they were manifested. Thus the earthly parts . . . return to the earth, the celestial to a superior heavenly limbus, and the spirit to God that gave it."

"This vanish or ascent of the inward etherial principles doth not presently follow their separation; for that part of man which Paracelsus calls the 'sidereal man' . . . but Agrippa calls the 'spectre' . . . in the astral man hovers sometimes about the dormitories of the dead. . . . In this 'spectre' is the seat of the imagination, and it retains after death an impress of those passions and affections to which it was subject in the body. This makes him haunt those places where the whole man has been most conversant, and imitate the actions and gestures of life."

"I conceive there are—besides the empyreal heaven—two inferior mansions or receptacles of spirits. The one is what our Saviour calls 'the outer darkness,' a place 'whence souls may never come forth' as the divine Plato hath it. The other, I suppose, is somewhat answerable to the Elysian fields . . . the suburbs of heaven, as it were. . . ."

Vaughan mentions also the view of Stellatus that there is "a successive, gradual ascent of the soul, according to the process of expiation."

"TRUE KNOWLEDGE."

The following two passages are from *Anima Magica Abscondita*, and are quotations from "one whom the Brothers of the R.C. (Rosy Cross) call Sapiens."

"True knowledge begins when, after a comparison of the imperishable with the perishable, of life and annihilation, the soul—yielding to the superior attraction of that which is eternal—doth elect to be made one with the Higher Soul. The mind emerges from that knowledge and, as a beginning, chooses voluntary separation of the body, beholding with the soul, on the one hand, the foulness and corruption of the body, and, on the other, the everlasting splendour and felicity of the Higher Soul. Being moved thereto by the Divine inbreathing . . . it yearns to be connected with the Soul. . . ."

"Learn from within thyself to know whatsoever is in heaven and on earth that thou mayest become wise in all things. Thou seest not that Heaven and the elements were once but One Substance and were separated one from another by Divine skill for the generation of thyself and all that is. Didst thou know this, the rest could not escape, unless indeed thou art devoid of all capacity."

"THY GUEST."

Vaughan continues in the same work: "Thou must prepare thyself till thou art conformable to Him Whom thou wouldst entertain, and that in every respect. . . . Fit thy roof to thy God in what thou canst, and in what thou canst not He will help thee. When thou hast set thy house in order, do not think thy Guest will come without invitation. Thou must tire him out with pious importunities,

> Perpetual knockings at His door,
> Tears sullying His transparent rooms,
> Sighs upon sighs: weep more and more—
> He comes."

"THE WAY THOU MUST WALK."

"This is the way thou must walk in, which if thou dost thou shalt perceive a sudden illustration, 'and there shall then abide in thee fire with light, wind with fire, power with wind, knowledge with power, and with knowledge an integrity of sober mind.' This is the chain that qualifies a Magician. For saith Agrippa: 'To make search into things

future and at hand, or into other hidden things, and those which are foreshewn to men divinely . . . , as also to perform works exceeding the common course of the powers of Nature, is not possible apart from a profound and perfect doctrine, an uncorrupted life and faith, and is not to be performed by light-minded and uninstructed men.' And in another place: 'No man can give that which he himself hath not. But no man hath save he who having suspended the elementary forces, having overcome nature, having compelled heaven, having reached the angels, hath ascended to the Archetype itself, as coadjutor whereof he can accomplish all things. This is the place where if thou canst but once ascend and then descend,

"Then oft the archetypal world attain,
And oft return thereto and, face to face,
Unhinder'd gaze upon the Father's Grace."

"Have therefore a charitable, seraphic soul: charitable at home in not being destructive to thyself . . . ; charitable abroad in a diffusive goodness to the poor. . . . Settle not then in the lees and puddle of the world; have thy heart in Heaven and thy hands on earth. Ascend in piety and descend in charity, for this is the nature of light, and the way of the children of it. Above all things avoid the guilt of innocent blood, for it utterly separates from God in this life and requires a timely and serious repentance if thou wouldst find Him in the next."

"I would have thee know that every day is a year contracted, that every year is a day extended. Anticipate the year in the day and lose not a day in the year. Make use of indeterminate agents till thou canst find a determinate one. . . . Circumferences spread but centres contract: so superiors dissolve and inferiors coagulate. . . . Learn from thy errors to be infallible, from thy misfortunes to be constant. There is nothing stronger than perseverance, for it ends in miracles."

THE DRAGON OF WISDOM.

"Separate therefore the thick from the thin[1] artificially, unless thou dost delight in extreme poverty. I give thee faculties both male and female, and the powers both of heaven and earth. The mysteries of My art are to be performed magnanimously and with great courage, if thou would have Me overcome the violence of the fire, in which attempt many have lost both their labour and their substance. I am the Egg of Nature known only to the wise, such as are pious and modest, who make of Me a Little World. Ordained I was by the Almighty for men, but—though many desire me—I am given only to few, that they may relieve the poor with My treasures and not set their mind on gold that perisheth . . . I am the old Dragon that is everywhere present on the face of the earth." (*Coelum Terrae*).

1 The spiritual and personal nature.

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